

ON ŠE'ELAT HALOM IN HASIDEI AŠKENAZ: SOURCES AND INFLUENCES

1. Introduction: *Mysticism and Dreams*

Mysticism deals with the search for a direct contact of man and God or other spiritual entities¹ either initiated by supernal beings in the form of inducing an unexpected feeling of a numinous presence, or the result of a human initiative to establish such a contact, those experiences of contact presuppose the transport of man on another level of experience, a change in his state of consciousness, a disclosure of spiritual realms of being which may have transforming effects². Mysticism is therefore breathing in a type of religious mentality, where the channel between man and God was conceived of as still open, notwithstanding some eventual obstacle to materialize this contact. Such an open channel was conceived of as still available even in those circles in the Rabbinic culture which proclaimed that prophecy ceased³.

Dream was conceived of, explicitly, as such a channel. According to a statement in *Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah*, fol. 5b God promised that despite the fact that he has turned away, or hidden, his face from the

people of Israel, he will nevertheless speak to them in a dream. Thus, even in a legalistic writing the assumption of the existence of an open channel is found, which presupposes the apparition of the divine in a dream. This is, to be sure, not the single case when a direct contact with God is conceived of as being possible, though the transformative aspects of this experience are less significant than they were in mystical literature⁴.

The topic of dreams in *Haside Aškenaz* has been treated twice in modern scholarship; first by Monford Harris⁵ and then by Joseph Dan⁶. These two scholars have focused their discussion on the views of this matter especially as found in *Sefer Hasidim*, and in some of the discussions found in the literature of this group, like some of the discussions of Eleazar ben Yehudah of Worms (c. 1165–c. 1230). More recently Tamar Alexander-Frizer has dealt with the issue of *še'elat halom* as it appears in connection to the story of the pious sinner, which is the main topic of her treatment⁷. The purpose of the present lecture is to describe some aspects of a particular type of

¹ See PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 6.9.11. Insofar as Jewish mysticism is concerned, the term 'contact' as reflecting the manner of relationship between the mystic and God, has been used especially by G. SCHOLEM, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, tr. Manheim, Schocken Books, New York 1969, p. 8 and his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Schocken Books, New York 1968, p. 4. See also M. IDEL, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, Yale University Press, New Haven, London 1988, p. XVIII.

² Unlike the more intimate and transformative nature of the mystical experiences, the encounters with spiritual beings in dream are more momentary. See below, note 76.

³ See E.E. URBACH, *The World of the Sages, Collected Studies*, The Magnes Press, Jerusalem 1988, pp. 9–20 [Hebrew].

⁴ See A.J. HESCHEL, *Prophetic Inspiration after the Prophets, Maimonides and Other Medieval Au-*

thorities, ed. M.M. Fainerstein, Ktav Publishing House, Hoboken, NJ 1996. Heschel addressed the issue of dreams several times in his studies, some of them will be referred in the footnotes below.

⁵ See M. HARRIS, *Dreams in Sefer Hasidim*, *PAAJR* vol. XXXI (1963), pp. 73–74.

⁶ See J. DAN, *Le-Torat he-Halom šel Haside Aškenaz*, «Sinai» vol. 68 (1971), pp. 288–293 [Hebrew]; E. KANARFOGEL, «Peering Through the Lattices»: *Mystical, Magical, and Pietistic Dimensions in the Tosafist Period*, Wayne University Press, Detroit 2000, pp. 67, 78, 107, note 26, 132–133, 184, note 116, 194, 232.

⁷ T. ALEXANDER-FRIZER, *The Pious Sinner, Ethics and Aesthetics in the Medieval Hasidic Narrative*, J.C.B. Mohr, Tuebingen 1991, pp. 91–97.

dreams, that induced by the technique designated as *še'elat halom*, aspects which were not discussed previously, and attempt to draw some conclusions from the mentioning of this device by the Ashkenazi Hasidism, including Yehudah ha-Hasid, for a certain aspect of the history of Jewish mysticism in general. However, before embarking the main topic of our discussion, let me point out that in this brand of medieval Jewish literature, a divine appearance in dream, reminiscent of the Talmudic statement mentioned above, is quite evident. In addition to the more corporeal explanation of dreams at the beginning of night, which were conceived of as devoid of revelatory contents, or those at the end of the night, which were conceived of as having much more intellectual content, as they were the result of external interventions, of angels or demons⁸, at least in one case dreams were described by Eleazar of Worms as coming from God:

«Also in dream He tells future things, in order to announce that [both] the body and the thoughts are in His possession, and there is a divinity who is ruling over it, and He is hidden from the eye but nothing is hidden from Him, and He is knowing everything, while being One»⁹.

Like in the Talmudic statement mentioned above, God uses the medium of dream in connection to His ruling in the world; however, this manner of establishing the nature and identity of the Master of the World is not only a matter of leaving His traces in the world, and onto the human body¹⁰ as indeed it is the case in other discussions in *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, but also in penetrating one of the inmost domain of human consciousness, dream. Dream, like other realms of reality, are conceived of as

texts to be decoded, in order to find out the order imprinted by the divinity, and discover It within this order.

2. Induced Dreams with Visual Revelations.

However, before addressing the views of the Ashkenazi authors on dream question let me address the view expressed more two centuries beforehand, in a *responsum* of Hai ben Sherira Gaon (939–1038), an important halakhic authority in the East, and one highly respected by the Ashkenazi Hasidism¹¹:

«Likewise a dream question: there were several elders and pious men who lived with us who knew them¹² and fasted for several days, neither eating meat nor drinking wine, [staying] in a pure place and praying and reciting great and well-known verses and [their] letters by numbers, and they went to sleep and saw wondrous dreams similar to a prophetic vision»¹³.

The attainment of the dream experience was conceived of as a very high one, described as “a prophetic vision”. In preparation for it, the aspirant is requested to fast, to be in a pure place and then pray and recite some verses. The precise nature of these verses, and that of the “letters by numbers” has not been specified. One proposal, offered by a very important scholar was that these verses and letters are connected by means of gematriah, without entering in any details of this proposal¹⁴. In a discussion of this passage, I have conjecture that the verses and the letters mentioned here are no other than the three verses in Exodus 14:19–21, which consist, each of them, of seventy-two consonants. From these verses numerous Jewish authors in the Middle Ages have claimed that the divine name of the sev-

enty-two letters emerges¹⁵. However, one of the earliest among them, Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra mentions in the two versions of his commentary on these verses in *Exodus* that he found in an ancient book, named either *Sefer ha-Razim* or *Sefer Raziel* that *še'elat halom* is achieved by means of the name of seventy-two letters, which he relates to the first verse of the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel¹⁶. Thus, this book, dealing with magic, and apparently predating the elders mentioned by Hai Gaon, presupposes, in addition to the corporeal preparations, also the recitations of the name of seventy-two letters, and there is good reason to interpret the Gaon’s description as referring to this divine name¹⁷.

Though Abraham ibn Ezra made his remarks on the dream question and the seventy-two letters while dealing with the Exodus verses, he did not specify – in the above-mentioned context – that his view differs from that of the magical book he is quoting, and which deals with another verse, that from Ezekiel. Thus, though we may infer from his discussion mentioned above that he indeed has seen a nexus between the dream question technique and the name of seventy-two letters, it is not quite obvious that we may infer from his discussion, or that of Hai, that they had in mind also the Exodus verses in this context. However, in his *Sefer ha-Sem* ch. 5 he mentions ex-

plicitly the *Exodus* verses as the source of the seventy-two names that is related to the dream question. In one of his poems, he indeed refers to the oneirogenetic role of this name:

«And the secret of seventy-two over all name I shall enhance. Their initials are *Wa'w He' Wa'w* and their finals are *Mem Waw Mem*. And the reading of the three verses in the Torah of God, will answer him»¹⁸.

In my opinion, against the background of other discussions of Ibn Ezra of the nexus between this name and the dream question, which means in fact answering in dream to question posed prior, we should understand the last verb *ya'anenu* as referring to an answer offered in dream, provoked by the prior reading of the *Exodus* verses. Moreover, in a magical recipe dealing with inducing an answer in dream, found in two manuscripts of the Ashkenazi Hasidism in connection to the name of seventy-two letters, it is said:

«Behold, the divine name of seventy-two letters written in this order etc., and it is written when the body¹⁹ was impure²⁰. If you will keep it in an appropriate manner, you will be happy in this world and in the world to come. And this is its [magical] use: if you will write it on the skin of a fish or an a tablet of pure silver, and you will put it under the

¹⁵ The earliest dated text describing this name is Rashi's commentary on *Sukkah*, fol. 45a. However, in Tuviyah ben Eliezer's *Midras Leqah Tov*, ed. S. Buber, Wilna 1880, vol. II, fol. 44b, this name is mentioned in the name of a magical writing: *Sefer ha-Yašar*. More on this book see Buber's introduction, vol. I p. 40 [Hebrew]. This magical book, which is apparently lost, might be similar to the *Sefer Raziel* or *Sefer ha-Razim* mentioned by Abraham ibn Ezra. See immediately below.

¹⁶ E.R. WOLFSON, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1994, p. 236 note 191.

¹⁷ See also another tradition, adduced in the name of Meshullam ha-Tzafati, who quotes *Sefer Raziel* as a book dealing with the name of seventy-two letters and with *Urim ve-Tummim*, which is another divinatory praxis. See M. IDEL, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, tr. J. Chipman,

SUNY Press, Albany 1987, p. 105. More on this author who is to be identified, in my opinion with Meshullam ha-Tzefati, see M. VERMAN, *The Book of Contemplation, Medieval Jewish Mystical Sources*, SUNY Press, Albany 1992, pp. 204–210. According to some formulations, found also in one of Eleazar's writings and quoted in his name the very gematriah of *et ha-'Urim ve-ha-Tummim* is *šem ben šiv'in u-setayim*; See IDEL, *ibid.*, p. 158 note 45 and Eleazar's *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, ed. J. KLUC-MANN, Benei Beraq 1980, vol. II, pp. 152–153.

¹⁸ On the name of seventy-two letters in Ibn Ezra see the long footnote of I. LEVIN, *The Religious Poems of Abraham ibn Ezra*, Jerusalem 1975, vol. I p. 136 note to line 5 [Hebrew] and HESCHEL, *Prophetic Inspiration*, p. 54 note 161.

¹⁹ Apparently the writer's body.
²⁰ *Be-tam'ut ha-guf*.

⁸ On these explanations see DAN, *Le-Torat ha-Halom*, cit.

⁹ *Hokmat ha-Nefesh*, Benei Beraq 1987, p. 113. Compare also to Eleazar's *Sefer ha-Roqeah*, Jerusalem 1960, p. 20, where a verse dealing with God's speaking in dream is adduced.

¹⁰ See *ibid.* More on this issue see J. DAN, *The Esoteric Theology of Hasidei Ashkenaz*, Mossad Bialik, Jerusalem 1968, pp. 84–104 [Hebrew].

¹¹ See DAN, *ibid.*, pp. 11, 23, 63, 124–128.

¹² The divine names.

¹³ See the quote in Yehudah Barceloni's *Perus Sefer Yesirah*, Berlin 1885, p. 104; and also *Ta'am Zegenim*, Frankfurt a. Main 1855, p. 54; Ms. New York, JTS 1805, fol. 41a; HESCHEL, *Prophetic Inspiration*, pp. 55–67.

¹⁴ See G. VAJDA, *Etudes sur Qirqisani*, *REJ*, vol. 106 (1941–1946), p. 107 note 2.

left²¹, you may ask in your dream whatever your soul desires. And if you will write it on the *kafer* parchment of a deer, and you will read it as it is written, during the morning prayer and the evening one, [and] your prayer is with intention and a careful recitation of letters, and in a pure place, [your heart] will be open²² to know wisdom and knowledge, as the entrance of the world²³⁻²⁴.

Again, the dream question is connected to the same divine name, with a pure place and with prayer, in a manner reminiscent of Hai Gaon's description of the practices in his generation. I do not claim, by any means, that the last quote is preserving the precise practice of Hai's acquaintances, but we should nevertheless be open to the possibility that similar forms of magic were transmitted in different versions over from the East to Europe, and those similar traditions are the reason for the affinities between the 11th century description and that found in the above Aškenazi *Siddur*. Two two traditions differ, however, on the description of the achievement of aspirants; Hai speaks of experiences which are closer to mystical ones, while the Aškenazi formula deals with achieving better intellectual capacities. The nexus between an induced dream and a prophetic attainment involves a new understanding of prophecy as dealing not with a message coming from above because of divine initiative alone, but also as an experience induced by man's resorting to a certain technique. Prophecy becomes much closer to mysticism than to the classical prophecy. Dream, according to such a view, is the possible locus of a sublime experience, which may be induced deliberately. This *rapprochement* between dream and

prophecy is not totally new: already in the Talmud dream was conceived of a sixty part of prophecy²⁵. However, there the divinatory aspect of prophecy not the mystical one, like in the later cases, is informing the Rabbi's discourse. Let us address another mentioning of ſe'elat halom in an Aškenazi writing: Eleazar of Worms mentions the Talmudic discussion of Shimeon bar Yohai that he has seen those who are the sons of the 'aliyyah, who are few, and if they are two, it is he and his sons who are found there on high²⁶. Commenting on this statement, Eleazar writes: «He has seen either by [means of] ſe'elat halom or as Nehuniyah ben ha-Qanah [did]²⁷. Therefore, the vision of someone's status in the world-to-come may be achieved by means of a dream question, though the aspirant has an alternative, to resort to practices like those of Nehuniyah ha-Qanah, namely the technique found in the Heikalot literature²⁸. In other words, the two techniques, that of obtaining the dream question and that of the Heikalot descendant, different as they may be, may achieve the same goal. Eleazar's view on Shimeon bar Yohai's seeing his special status in the next world, namely his being *ben 'aliyyah* by means of an activity similar to the dream question is reminiscent of the famous passage in *Sefer Hasidim* dealing with the pious sinner. According to the beginning of this passage «It happened that a ḥasid has done a dream question as to who would sit next to him in paradise. They showed him a young man who lived far away».²⁹

In both cases knowledge of the status of the questioner in the next world is dealt with, and in both cases the partner is a young man.

²¹ Apparently the left hand.

²² *Yefyeh patah*.

²³ *Petah 'Olam*. May be that this is a type error for *Petah Ulam*, an expression found in similar contexts.

²⁴ *Siddur Rabbeinu Šelomo of Germayza*, ed. M. HERSHLER, Jerusalem 1972, p. 99. On another instance of using the name of seventy-two letters, according to an anonymous Aškenazi author, for magical aims, namely for creating a *Golem*, or for therapeutic aims see M. IDEL, *Golem: Jewish Magi-*

cal and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid, SUNY Press, Albany 1990, pp. 63-64.

²⁵ *Berakot*, fol. 57b; see also *ibid.*, fol. 55b.

²⁶ Cf. *Sukkah*, fol. 45b.

²⁷ *Hokmat ha-Nefesh*, p. 59.

²⁸ Cf. IDEL, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 14-16.

²⁹ par. 80 p. 53; on this passage see HARRIS, *Dreams*, p. 73; ALEXANDER-FRIZER, *The Pious Sinner*, pp. 91-97. More on the dream questions see *ibid.*, pp. 87, 89, 117, 145.

However, what is important is the very fact that the activistic attitude to dream is shared by two of the most important sources of Aškenazi Hasidism. This form of awareness is conceived of as both reliable and attainable by human initiative, when informed by the appropriate technique. In another instance, a disciple asked his dead master to appear to him in a dream in order to show him the place of the master in the world-to-come³⁰. Though the phrase ſe'elat halom does not occur in this context, the disciple is nevertheless described as stretching himself out on the grave of his master, apparently as part of his attempt to provoke the apparition of the master in dream. The master is telling him that his place in Eden is found within a great light, that the disciple, yet having to attain more religious merits, cannot now see it. It should be mentioned that the dream question was a technique quite popular in the period as we learn from Jacob of Marvege's *Se'elot u-tešwot min ha-Šamayim* as well as a statement of Eleazar of Worms's *Commentary on the Pentateuch* where this technique is mentioned as available to everyone:

•When someone sleeps, let everyone be careful not to touch the thigh-vein with his hands, because the 'masters of dreams'³¹ will terrify him, because there is the middle of the body; or when someone performs a dream question, let he be careful not to touch the thigh-vein.³²

We do not have too many details about the different technique for inducing dreams among the Ḥasidei Aškenaz; we may assume that the name of seventy-two letters served for this purpose, as in the earlier discussions, found in Hai Gaon and Abraham ibn Ezra, and

³⁰ *Sefer Hasidim*, no. 1556, p. 381; HARRIS, *Dreams*, p. 73.

³¹ *Ba'ale ha-halomot*. On this expression see HESCHEL, *Prophetic Inspiration*, p. 55 note 161.

³² ELEAZAR OF WORMS, *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, Benei Beraq, Jerusalem 1986, vol. I, p. 250.

³³ MARCALIOTH, *Sefer ha-Razim*, p. 32.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Roš hodesh*.

this assumption is corroborated by the recipe discussed above, which was preserved in an Aškenazi *Siddur*. We may also assume, though there is no conclusive evidence for this effect, that also the text of *Sefer Raziel*, or *Sefer ha-Razim*, that was in the front of ibn Ezra's eyes, has been known by Eleazar, who seems to be the first author in Europe to mention this book³³. In any case, as Margalioth has shown, Ms. Oxford 1345, where a text closely related to *Sefer ha-Razim* has been known by Eleazar³⁴. In this text, a recipe for a ſe'elat halom is found; it is worthwhile of discussing some of the details of this recipe in our context:

•And these are the words of the book and its ways and mercies in order to approach God in a pure manner, so that someone will be successful and do if someone wished to do something, and to know and discern the true thing. He should figure out the seven days before the beginning of the month³⁵; during those days he should not eat anything impure neither something from which blood emerges³⁶, neither drink wine. He should avoid a sexual intercourse³⁷ and wash every day before the rise of sun. He should bring two doves or two white sons of doves, and slaughter them with a knife³⁸ ...and he should be dressed in a white dress and he stands and walks barefoot and he recites the names of the angels mentioned below, that are appointed over the month in which you would like to ask your question regarding your needs. You should do so during three days: then, in the third day you should bring all the fat ashes of sacrifice³⁹ that you have produced during the three days. He should prepare the house alone and he should spread all the ashes on the earth in the house and recite the names of the mighty, great, powerful and holy angels, ruling over that month and then sleep without saying anything to anyone. And they will come during the

³⁶ Compare to the Genizah magical text discussed in M.D. SWARTZ, "Like the Ministering Angels"; *Ritual and Purity in Early Jewish Mysticism and Magic*, *AJSReview* vol. 19/2 (1994), pp. 144-145, 149.

³⁷ See also below, note 47.

³⁸ In the passage I have skipped, there are details of the sacrifice.

³⁹ *Dešen*.

night in a vision, 'in a vision not in enigmas'⁴⁰, and they will tell you whatever you wish, without [causing you] fear.⁴¹

Though the term *še’elat halom* does not occur explicitly in this recipe, all the important components of this literary genre are present here; there are special preparations, which precede the sleep of the aspirant, and the spiritual powers, or the angels, are supposed to answer during the sleep the questions of the sleeper. The magical aspects of this recipe are obvious; sacrifices of birds, resort to names of angels appointed on a certain time in the year, in order to achieve goals, that may only partially coincide with mysticism as described above. Nevertheless, we should not overlook the fact that divinity is also involved in this recipe in a quite explicit manner. The opening statement dealing with ways to approach God in a pure manner is quite conspicuous, which the resort to the verse on the revelation of God at the end, corroborates this assumption. Though the angels had, no doubt, quite an important role in the magical rite, God's revelation is nevertheless hinted at in this text. It should be mentioned that in the more well-known form of *Sefer Raziel*, as printed in Amsterdam in 1701, which reflects also much later developments in Jewish mysticism⁴² there are three recipes for dream questions, but there is no way to prove their dates. In one of them, we learn, in a manner somewhat similar to the aforescribed recipe, that someone should lay on the ground looking to a candle. The precise formulation is not so clear; the assumption is that someone is laying on the dust of 'half of his house', *hasi beteka*⁴³, a motif that is similar to the quote from *Sefer Adam*⁴⁴.

In all the above cases, the induced dream is the locus of an apparition of some sort; either the vision of Shimeon according to Eleazar, or the vision of the place of the pious in the Garden of Eden, or of the place of the ascetic pious in the other case, or the vision of the angels the last instance. The induced dream is therefore a place where seeing of a sublime picture is possible. Dream therefore is conceived in some cases as a momentary foretaste of the paradisaical state, attained in a special state of consciousness. Such a reading of the role of the dream-question brings some of the experiences induced by these techniques closer to mysticism, which has been described as a 'nostalgia for the Paradise'⁴⁵. I would like to emphasize that not all the effects of a dream question should be conceived of in terms of mystical experiences, but only those in which a vision of someone's status in the world to come, which is in fact a attempt to verify someone's religious status while alive in this world. In many other cases, and I assume and in most of them, the goals of a dream question is much more magical than mystical; nevertheless, this important magical aspect of the dream question does not invalidate the mystical overtones of those instances when the aim of the dream is to achieve a vision of the other world. Let me remind that, as mentioned above, both Hai Gaon and Eleazar had compared the religious attainment of the dream question with what has been conceived by them to be elevated forms of religious experiences.

3. Oral Revelations

With these observations in mind let me address now a dream question that has been at-

⁴⁰ Num. 12:8.

⁴¹ Printed in Margaliouth's introduction to *Sefer Ha-Razim*, pp. 32-33 from Ms. Oxford 123. MARGALIOUH, *ibid.*, has pointed out in the notes to this text, stemming from a *Book of Adam*, important affinities between its details and *Sefer Ha-Razim*.

⁴² Like the Kabbalah from the circle of *Sefer ha-Temunah* for example, a circle that was active, in my opinion, in Byzantium during the second half of the 14th century.

⁴³ Compare ALEXANDER-FRIZER, *The Pious Sinner*, p. 93.

⁴⁴ Perhaps this situation of mentioning the dust and the ashes has something to do with the ritual of creating a *Golem* according to some recipes found in the writings of *Haside Ashkenaz*; see IDEL, *Golem*, pp. 60, 63, 69-70, where dust is spread on the ground.

⁴⁵ See M. ELIADE, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, tr. Ph. Mairet, Harper Torchbooks, New York, etc., 1960, pp. 59-72.

tributed in several manuscripts to Yehudah he-Hasid:

«*še’elat halom* from the mouth of the Hasid the Rabbi Yehudah: He should fast for one day, in the manner of *Yom Kippur*, let him have a [ritual] bath and purify himself from any impurity, and in the evening when he will go to bed, he should dress himself with white clothes and write the following names on the palm of his left hand: 'Apnt, Mashpelah, Yail, Pinpat Tire'⁴⁶ and he should not erase them till they will pass away by themselves. Then he should say: I so and so, invoke you, the angels of the dreams, 'Apnt, Mashpelah, Yail, Pinpat Tire', that you will announce so and so. And let him ask what he wants; and he should not touch a woman three days before doing it⁴⁷. And this is tested and experimented.⁴⁸

Here we have the technique of a dream question, with some more details than in the earlier cases, but on the other hand, the nature of the aims is not specified as in some of the above cases, when a more mystical attainment has been mentioned. This text is a *carte blanche*. Let therefore attempt to analyze the details of this technique: the purification requirements are quite dominant and they are reminiscent of two most important moments in Jewish religion: the Sinaiitic revelation and the *Yom Kippur* preparations. The former topic is not explicitly mentioned, but the occurrence of the three days refrain from sexual relationship is a plausible indication in this direction. The *Yom Kippur* is mentioned explicitly. Thus, the aspirant is preparing himself for an encounter with the angels of dream. However, unlike the Sinaiitic revelation and the *Yom Kippur* experience, here we have an anomian experience, namely a form of encounter with the numinous

that is not part of the regular religious behavior but it is initiated by the 'dreamer' which uses techniques that are not part of the halakhic requirements, in order to profit or benefit from his resort to these techniques. However, unlike the earlier attainments depending upon the dream question, which were visual, in the recipe attributed to Yehudah he-Hasid there is a message that is explicitly auditory. Angels come not in order to reveal themselves, namely their *morphe* or splendor for example, but mostly in order to deliver a message. From this point of view, the last recipe is much more in line with the hundreds of recipes dealing with dream questions, which deal with disclosure of answers to various quandaries, most of them explained in a vocal manner, often by referring to a biblical verse as the clue for the answer. As a literary genre, *še’elat halom* followed the oral, rather than the visual path. This oral aspect has been also well represented among *Hasidei Ashkenaz*.

4. Abraham Abulafia: Revelations and the Name of the Seventy-Two Letters

The importance of dreams for achieving veridical messages stemming from spiritual entities in *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, testifies for a type of technique, having also mystical aspects, that is not evident in the ascending descriptions of the corpus of the *Heikhalot* literature. Though affinities between the attainments reached by *še’elat halom* and *Hekalot* techniques have been mentioned by Eleazar of Worms, and while similarities between the two *modi* of techniques may be detected⁴⁹ it seems that the two forms of revelations stem from different sources: the descending mode, as represented

⁴⁶ The vocalizations of the consonants suggested here is quite tentative.

⁴⁷ Compare *Exodus* 19:15. This restriction is found also in *Hekalot* techniques. See the text of *Hekalot Zutarti*, translated in D.J. HALPERIN, *A New Edition of Hekhalot Literature*, «Journal of the American Oriental Society», vol. 104 (1984), p. 550. See also above, note 37.

⁴⁸ *Bahun u-menusseh*. This is a commonplace recurring in many magical recipes. See Ms. Cin-

cinnati Add. 14, fols. 86b-87a; Ms. Jerusalem, Jewish National and University Library 476, fol. 53a; D. Abrams pointed out to me also Ms. Vienna 28, fol. 57b.

⁴⁹ Rebecca Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power: Adjurations in the Hekalot Literature, Jewish Amulets, and Greek Revelatory Adjurations*, Ph. D Thesis, Harvard University, Cambridge 1995.

by *Sar ha-Torah* is much more similar to *še'elat halom*, while both differ from the ascending types of descriptions. Though found together in some medieval manuscripts, it is still plausible to assume that the two forms of technique represent, initially, different approaches: while most of the *Hekalot* literature presents a technique closer to the astral body ascent, the *še'elat halom* deals more with a technique of bringing down the angels, and therefore closer to *Sar ha-Torah* technique. Insofar as the technique for eliciting an answer in dream is concerned, most of the discussions mentioned above, rotate around the name of seventy-two letters, which is not testified in the *Hekalot* literature, but is related to at least one source that was apparently not entirely reflecting the trend of *Heikalot* literature, namely *Sefer Raziel* or *Sefer ha-Razim*. In the late medieval versions of this text – which may well be different from the early medieval and late antiquity texts bearing the same title – there is a lengthy commentary on the name of seventy-two letters but this is a 14th century kabbalistic text, stemming from the school of *Sefer ha-Temunah*⁵⁰. There is good reason to assume that a version of *Sefer Raziel* was known to Abraham Abulafia, as we learn from an instance in one of his epistles, where he refers to a *gematria* which was found in this book⁵¹. However, it is precisely the divine name of seventy-two letters that had an impressive impact on the further development of mystical techniques, as we witness from the most important handbook of ecstatic Kabbalah, where this divine name is one of the most dominant elements⁵². There are good reasons to assume that material stemming from *Hasidei Aškenaz* played an impor-

tant role in transmitting the technical attitude to the Spanish kabbalists. Abraham Abulafia mentions explicitly books of Yehudah ha-Hasid of Regensburg⁵³ and by Eleazar of Worms⁵⁴. On the other hand, he never mentions Hai Gaon or Abraham ibn Ezra, in this context. Let me adduce one example dealing with this mystical importance of the name of seventy-two letters. In his *Hayye ha-'Olam ha-ba* after describing, in the regular way, how this name emerges from the three verses from *Exodus*, Abulafia writes:

Behold this sublime name, written in an explicit manner, combined in an appropriate way...and whoever knows how to permute⁵⁵ it in an adequate manner, the divine spirit will certainly envelop⁵⁶ him or the efflux of wisdom will emanate upon him, and guide his intellect the essence of reality in a sudden manner,... and all these names are combined here, in order to explain the secrets of these seventy-two letters, from which the life of the world-to-come is attained by those who prophesy, and this is the reason this book is called *The Life of the World to Come*.⁵⁷

In the context of a quote from an earlier book, apparently lost one but belonging to ecstatic Kabbalah, the 16th century Safedian kabbalist Moses Cordovero mentions that «Several of the early ones explained that by the combination and transmutation of the 72-letter holy name or the other names, after great *hitbodedut*, the righteous man, who is worthy and enlightened in such matters, will have a portion of the Divine Voice⁵⁸ revealed to him, in the sense of, 'The spirit of God spoke in me, and his word was on my lips'⁵⁹. For he combines together the potencies and unites them and

arouses desire in them, each to its brother, as the membrum virile of man and his companion⁶⁰, until there is poured upon him a spirit of abundance – on the condition that he be engaged in this thing, as a vessel prepared to and worthy of receiving the spirit, for if such is not the case, it will become cruel⁶¹ and be turned into "a degenerate wild vine"^{62, 63}.

I could adduce many other examples dealing with the revelatory role of the name of seventy-two letters⁶⁴. I chose to adduce Abulafia's view, because it had a huge impact, as it has been copied, without mentioning the source, in the standard edition of *Sefer Raziel ha-Malak*⁶⁵. This fact has been duly recognized, already a century and a half ago by Eliakim Milzraghi, who attributed the whole book to Abraham Abulafia, an attribution that is obviously mistaken⁶⁶. However, it is quite remarkable that the traditions related to the name of seventy-two letters and revelations, recur in the context of the various versions of *Sefer Raziel ha-Malak*. It is possible that in version of *Sefer Raziel* known to Abulafia, like in that quoted by ibn Ezra, the nexus between the name of seventy-two letters and dream was mentioned; in any case, it is plausible to assume such linkage in one of Abulafia's discussions: «They⁶⁷ are speaking with the prophets in their dreams, in the *Urim* and *Tummim*⁶⁸ in the Divine Spirit and during prophecy»⁶⁹.

⁵⁰ I hope to elaborate elsewhere on the datation of this school.

⁵¹ See Ševa' *Netivot ha-Torah*, printed by A. JELLINEK, *Philosophie und Kabbala*, Leipzig 1853, p. 2; see also p. 21.

⁵² This is obvious in two of the most important treatises of ecstatic Kabbalah, ABRAHAM ABULAFIA'S, *Hayye ha-'Olam ha-ba*, [see immediately below], and his student's *Sefer Še'arei Šedeq*, note 64 below.

⁵³ See ABULAFIA'S, *We-zot li-Yehudah*, printed by A. Jellinek in Auswahl Kabbalistischer Mystik, Er-

stes Heft, Leipzig 1853, p. 25: "R. Yehudah ha-Hasid Ashkenazi"; See M. IDEL, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, tr. M. Kallus, SUNY Press, Albany 1989, pp. 2, 134, 135.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵ *Le-galgele*.

⁵⁶ *Lovašeto*.

⁵⁷ Ms. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale 777, fols. 108-109a.

⁵⁸ *Bat qol*.

⁵⁹ II Sam. 23:2.

The speech of the names wit the prophets can be attributed to any of the numerous divine names. However, in his *Hayye ha-'Olam ha-ba* Abulafia writes explicitly about the encounter between the mystic and letters of the names, including the name of seventy-two letters, envisioned as angels, and the conversation between them:

«You are already prepared to receive the efflux, and the efflux is emanating upon you and raises you to many things, one after another. Prepare your true thought to imagine God, blessed be He, and the supernal angels⁷⁰ and imagine them in your heart as if they are men standing or sitting around you and you are amidst them like an emissary that the king and his servant want to send, and he is prepared to listen from their mouth the content of the message, either from the king or from one of his servant⁷¹. After you have imagined this whole thing prepare your intellect and heart to understand your thoughts, [namely] the numerous matters that come to you, the intellectual letters that are] in your heart or the deeds, and inquires them in general or in their parts like in the case of a man that is told a parable or an enigma or a dream, or inquires a book of wisdom dealing with a deep issue, and [you] will hear a perfect interpretation, and bring closer insofar as you can»⁷².

The mystic is therefore receiving a message from the king, namely God, or one of his angels or servants, according to Abulafia a

⁶⁰ I.e., the female.

⁶¹ Compare *Sefer ha-'Aṣamim*, attributed to Abraham ibn Ezra, p. 13: «There is a prophet to whom [prophecy] is emanated while he is awake, without him being caused to dream or his power being weakened or him falling asleep, and if he were not expert in drawing it down, along with knowing its service and its sacrifices – then he would be killed». Cfr. also p. 14 and see my article, *The Epistle of R. Isaac of Pisa [?]* in Three Versions. «Qoves 'al Yad», vol. 10 [20] (1982), pp. 166-167 [Hebrew].

⁶² Jeremiah 2:21

⁶³ *Pardes Rimonim*, part 2, fol. 69b.

⁶⁴ See e.g. the lengthy and very interesting discussion found in Natan ben Sa'adyah Harar's, *Ša'are Šedeq*, in a passage translated in G. SCHOLEM, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York, Schocken Books 1967, pp. 150-151.

⁶⁵ fol. 25c.

⁶⁶ See *Osar ha-Rabiyah*, Ms. London-Montefiore 347.

⁶⁷ Namely the names and the seals.

⁶⁸ On this technique of revelation as understood by Abulafia see IDEL, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 105-108, 158-160; Id., *Studies in Ecstatic Kabalah*, SUNY Press, Albany 1989, pp. 125-126.

⁶⁹ *Auswahl*, p. 15, corrected according to Ms. New York, JTS, 1887, fol. 98b.

⁷⁰ That these angels are divine names is obvious from the drawing found in the manuscript, where also the name of seventy-two letters is drawn. See *ibid.*, fol. 58a.

⁷¹ On the creation of images as part of the revelatory process see Ms. Oxford 1582, fol. 59a.

⁷² Ms. Oxford 1582, fol. 52ab.

separate intellect. This message has many forms: it is an enigma, a parable, a deep matter or a dream. Therefore, the dream, like the other possible forms of the intellectual efflux, is a coded message, obtained by using divine names, among them the name of seventy-two letters, and these names are imagined in a visual manner. These names are the source[s] of the dream. The nexus between the name of seventy-two letters and dream is even more conspicuous in a passage following the one quoted above; after recommending the recitation of this divine name, Abulafia claims that a revelation will take place, or a vision will be seen, stemming from the angel Gabriel⁷³ – which stands here for Metatron – one of terms used by Abulafia in order to point to the agent intellect. Metatron, described in some earlier sources as a witness, is related by Abulafia to dream: ‘*edi* – my witness – being numerically equal to *halom*, namely 84⁷⁴. Thus, again, the dream is connected to an angel and, at the same time, to the effect of recitation of the divine names of seventy-two letters.

5. Concluding Remarks

If our short reconstruction of the history of one of the many roles played by the name of seventy-two letters in the development of Jewish mysticism is correct, then the Aškenazi Hasidism should be understood as an important, perhaps even crucial, link between the Eastern traditions, magical and mystical altogether, and those tradition which nourished some Kabbalistic techniques, in our case the anomian one. The structure of the standard version of *Sefer Raziel* which incorporates *Hekalot* material, texts from *Haside Aškenaz*, from

ecstatic Kabbalah and from the kabbalistic literature from the circle of *Sefer ha-Temunah* as well as magical recipes including dream questions, is a fine example of the intersections, overlappings and interconnections between the various forms of Jewish mystical and magical literatures. The Aškenazi Hasidim, with their taste for eclectic compilation and appropriation, exemplified by their treatment of Hekalot literature, philosophy, magic and theosophical traditions, is a blueprint for many eclectic, and highly influential forms of writings in Jewish mysticism. As seen above, the first plausible evidence for the nexus between the praxis of *še'elat halom* and the name of seventy-two stems from Hai Gaon; it is interesting to notice that he is also the first author who resorted to the term *Kabbalah* in a context that is reminiscent of that of the *Haside Aškenaz* and ecstatic Kabbalah, namely as an esoteric tradition dealing with the divine names⁷⁵. Is it a mere accident that the first recourse to the term *Kabbalah* as esoterism related to divine names occurs in the testimonies of an author that is aware of the use of one of those divine names as part of a mystical technique? Is it an accident that this use of the term *Kabbalah* recurs among the Aškenazi Hasidism, who preserved also a view of the name of seventy-two letters in the context of revelatory experiences? Is it an accident that a version of *Sefer ha-Razim* and *Sefer Raziel*, which predate both Hai and the Aškenazi Hasidism, relates this divine name and the *še'elat halom*? On the basis of the few quotes from this book found in Abraham ibn Ezra and Abraham Abulafia, it seems that there was in existence an additional version of this book, which included material dealing with the issues discussed above, and if so, the nexus between the name of seventy-two letters and

še'elat halom is earlier than Hai Gaon. Did the nexus between *še'elat halom* and the recitation of the divine names become an integral part of Kabbalah: the answer to this question is positive⁷⁶.

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SUMMARY

The article examines the relationship between the divine names and techniques of inducing dreams in *Haside Aškenaz*, R. Yehudah he-Hasid and Eleazar of Worms, as part of a divination process. Of remarkable importance was the so-called name of seventy-two letters; the study considers its occurrences in the first medieval sources. The article also explores the plausible sources of those masters in earlier speculations, in particular Abraham ibn Ezra, and the impact of these techniques on the development of the ecstatic Qabbalah of Abraham Abulafia.

KEYWORDS: Divine names; Dreams in *Haside Aškenaz*; Ecstatic Kabbalah.

⁷³ In Hebrew *mare'h* is tantamount numerically to Gabriel namely 246. This *gematriah* is already found in Baruk Togarmi's *Commentary on Sefer Yeširah*, a source wellknown to Abraham Abulafia. See the text printed by G. SCHOLEM, *Ha-Kabbalah šel Sefer ha-Temunah ve-šel Avraham Abulafia*, BEN SHLOMO (ed.), Akademon, Jerusalem 1969, p. 232 [Hebrew].

⁷⁴ Ms. Oxford 1582, fol. 53ab.

⁷⁵ On this issue see M. IDEL, *Defining Kabbalah: The Kabbalah of the Divine Names*, R.A. Herrera (ed.), *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics, & Typology*, Peter Lang, New York 1993, pp. 97-122.

⁷⁶ See more on this issue M. IDEL, *Astral Dreams in Judaism: Twelfth to Fourteenth Centuries*, D. SHULMAN and G.C. STROUMSA (eds.), *Dream Cultures, Explorations in the Comparative History of Dream-*

ing, Oxford University Press, New York 1999, pp. 235-250, Ib., *Les Kabbalistes de la nuit*, Alia, Paris 2003.